

Story #247 (Tape #7, Summer 1970)

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Location: Yukarı Kise Köy, Güvem
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Date: July 1970

The Man Whose Industry Prompted Taxation

One of our tales, sir, goes as follows. The padişah of the time wanted to inspect the state of affairs in his country. In those days, all expenses were taken care of from the State Treasury and there were no taxes.* The padişah called his viziers to a meeting and said, "I want each of you to go and find out the state of affairs in different parts of the country."

The viziers mounted horses and traveled from place to place. One happened to come, for example, to this part of the country. He stopped at a fountain to water his horse, but the horse was frightened and would not go near the water. He wondered who or what it might be, and when he looked, he saw something shaking there. He dismounted and led his horse and came to the fountain where he saw a man. What do you think he was doing? Of all things, he was stomping felt.

"What [on earth] are you doing there?" the vizier asked.

"I am making felt in this mortal world."

"What is it on your back?"

"I am churning butter on my back [with the same motion] in this

*The narrator commits a malapropism here, quite in keeping with his ingenuous and uninformed notion of taxation. In saying that there were no taxes, he says there was no teklif or tekalîf, but these words refer not to taxation but to intimacy among friends and family members, without any protocol. The word he meant to use was mükellef or vergi mükellef, tax obligation.

At the end of the tale Ahmet Uysal questions Hacı Gonen on this confusion and the matter is clarified.

mortal world," he said.

The vizier thought that was very good. "Very well," he said. "What about that cap on your head?" There was something like tassels on it.

"I have got something that moves to frighten away birds from something laid out to dry* over there in this mortal world," he said.

"Very well. But what is that rope on your arm?"

"I am rocking the cradle of the baby of my daughter-in-law over there."

"Very well. That is all right, too," said the vizier.

"I just do not want to waste any time in this mortal world."

"Well, what about that thing on your other arm?"

"Well, with that arm I ring a bell in the vineyard to scare away the birds," he said.

"That is fine, too," said the vizier. "But what is your mouth doing?"

"Well, what can I do in this mortal world? I am reciting the Koran."

When the vizier heard all these things, he rode back and went to the presence of the padişah.

"What happened?" asked the padişah. "You returned too soon."

"Well, I have seen the whole world and got back."

"What happened?"

"What should happen? I shall not be able to calculate the work that one man alone does in one day," said the vizier.

"What do you mean?"

"I saw a man who was making felt, while he churned butter on his back, prevented chickens from eating stuff laid out to dry, scared birds

*Although Hacı Gönem does not say so, it is understood that the 'something laid out to dry' is bulgur (boiled, husked, cracked wheat) or tarhan (soup mix made of flour, wheat, and yoğurt). Virtually all Turkish rural peasants make their own bulgur and tarhan, their two basic foods. Both are allowed to dry for at least a day in the sun.

from the vineyard, rocked a cradle, and at the same time recited the Koran. These should be included in taxation.

It was a result of this vizier's observation that taxes [teklif and tekalüf] were imposed on the nation.

[Ahmet Uysal asked, "What do you mean by teklif and tekalüf?"

Hacı Gönem said, "I mean tax: vergi (tax) mükellefiyet."]]